

Yuma County Department of Public Works Hyder Material Source (AZA 32601)

Dear Interested Party:

Please be advised that an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared (EA-AZ-320-2005-007) for a proposed Free Use Permit (FUP) to Yuma County Department of Public Works. This EA is a public document, and it is available for your review and comment. The proposed action analyzed in the EA would include portions of the following described public lands:

Gila and Salt River Meridian, Yuma County, Arizona

T. 5 S., R. 12 W.,
sec. 25, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ (within).

The area described contains 20.00 acres approximately.

The intent of this EA is to analyze site specific environmental effects of a 20-acre FUP for the removal of an estimated 100,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands in Hyder, AZ, to be used for emergency maintenance on County roads over the next 10 years. The no action alternative would not authorize the proposed project. The proposed action would be in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987), and with the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan and its Record of Decision (June 1988).

Copies of the EA are available upon request from, and written comments may be submitted to, *Stephen Fusilier, 2555 E. Gila Ridge Road, Yuma, AZ 85365, (928) 317-3296*. This EA has also been posted on the Arizona State Office's web home page http://www.az.blm.gov/env_docs/proj_list.htm. The deadline for receipt of comments is August 31st. Public comments are welcome and encouraged.

By law, the names and addresses of those commenting are available for public review during regular business hours. However, individual commentators may request that their name and/or address be withheld from the record. These requests will be honored to the extent allowable by law. If you wish your name and/or address withheld, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment letter. All comments from organizations or businesses will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

Sincerely,
Rebecca Heick
Field Manager



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Yuma Field Office
2555 East Gila Ridge Road
Yuma, AZ 85365
www.az.blm.gov



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For

EA No. AZ-320-2005-007

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Yuma Field Office, has analyzed a proposal from Yuma County for a Free Use Permit (FUP) for the removal of an estimated 100,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands in Hyder, AZ, to be used for emergency maintenance on County roads over the next 10 years. The FUP would be issued under the authority of Title III of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, as amended, and the Materials Act (Act of June 31, 1947, 30 U.S.C 601, *et seq.*). The proposed action and the No Action Alternative are described within the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) No. AZ-320-2005-007.

The EA is tiered to and in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987), and with the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan and its Record of Decision (June 1988). Any of the above referenced documents may be viewed at the Yuma Field Office during normal business hours.

The proposed action would assure that no significant adverse impacts would occur to the human environment in the following areas: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Cultural Resources, Environmental Justice, Farm Lands (Prime or Unique), Floodplain, Hazardous or Solid Waste, Native American Religious Concerns, Non-Native Invasive Species, Threatened or Endangered Species, Water Quality (Ground or Surface), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or Wilderness.

The proposed action does not significantly affect energy supply, distribution, and/or use and therefore a Statement of Adverse Energy Impact is not required.

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me as is summarized above, it is my determination that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major Federal Action affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Rebecca Heick
Yuma Field Manager

Date

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA-AZ-320-2005-007**

FOR

**YUMA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
HYDER MATERIAL SOURCE
AZA 32601**

**TOWNSHIP 5 SOUTH, RANGE 12 WEST, SECTION 25
YUMA COUNTY, ARIZONA**

Prepared For:

**Bureau of Land Management
Yuma Field Office
2555 East Gila Ridge Road
Yuma, AZ 85365-2240**

Prepared By:

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July 2005

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1.1 BACKGROUND

Yuma County has requested a Free Use Permit (FUP) from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the removal of an estimated 100,000 cubic yards of mineral materials from BLM lands in Hyder, AZ, to be used for emergency maintenance on County roads over the next 10 years.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the action is to enable Yuma County to mine mineral materials at the proposed Hyder pit for use on Yuma County emergency road maintenance projects. The new pit is needed due to the fact that the nearest existing pit with the appropriate type of material is over 25 miles to the southwest. This new pit would provide resources for the northeast area of the county.

1.3 CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLANS

The proposed action is in conformance with the Yuma District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and its Record of Decision, as amended (May 1986 and February 1987), (page 13 – “The District would attempt to meet demands for common variety mineral materials, including sand, gravel and clay, through sale or free use permits on a case-by-case basis.”). The proposed action is also in conformance with the Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan and its Record of Decision (June 1988), (page 12 – “Demand for saleable minerals would be met by sales or free-use permits on a case-by-case basis).

1.4 RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS (EIS), ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS (EA), AND OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is tiered to the Yuma District Programmatic EA, No. AZ-050-78-26.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

Yuma County has requested a Free Use Permit to remove approximately 100,000 cubic yards of sand & gravel from approximately 20 acres of previously undisturbed lands near Hyder, Yuma County, over a 10-year term. A vicinity map of the project area is provided in Figure 1. The affected lands are described as follows:

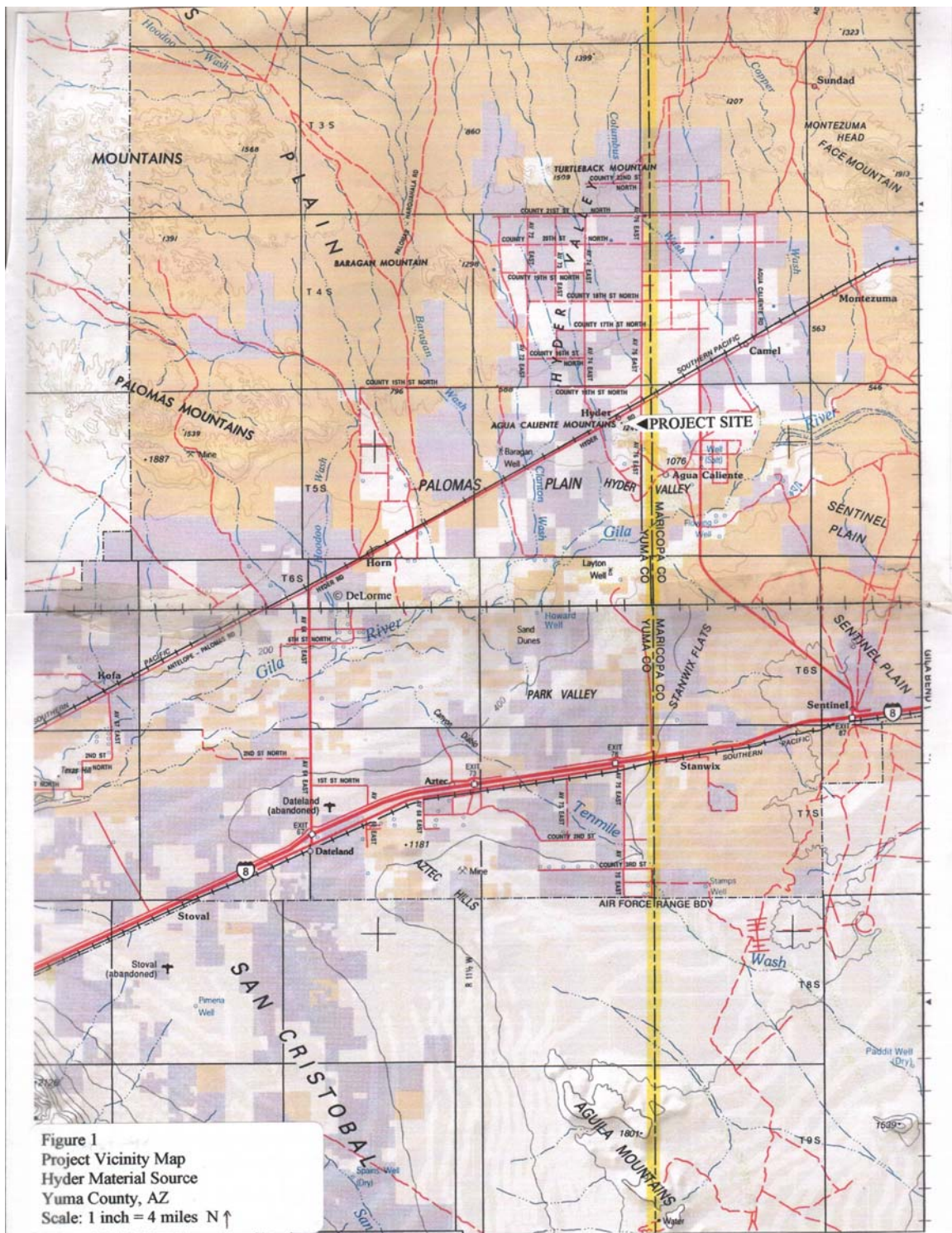
Gila and Salt River Meridian, Yuma County, Arizona

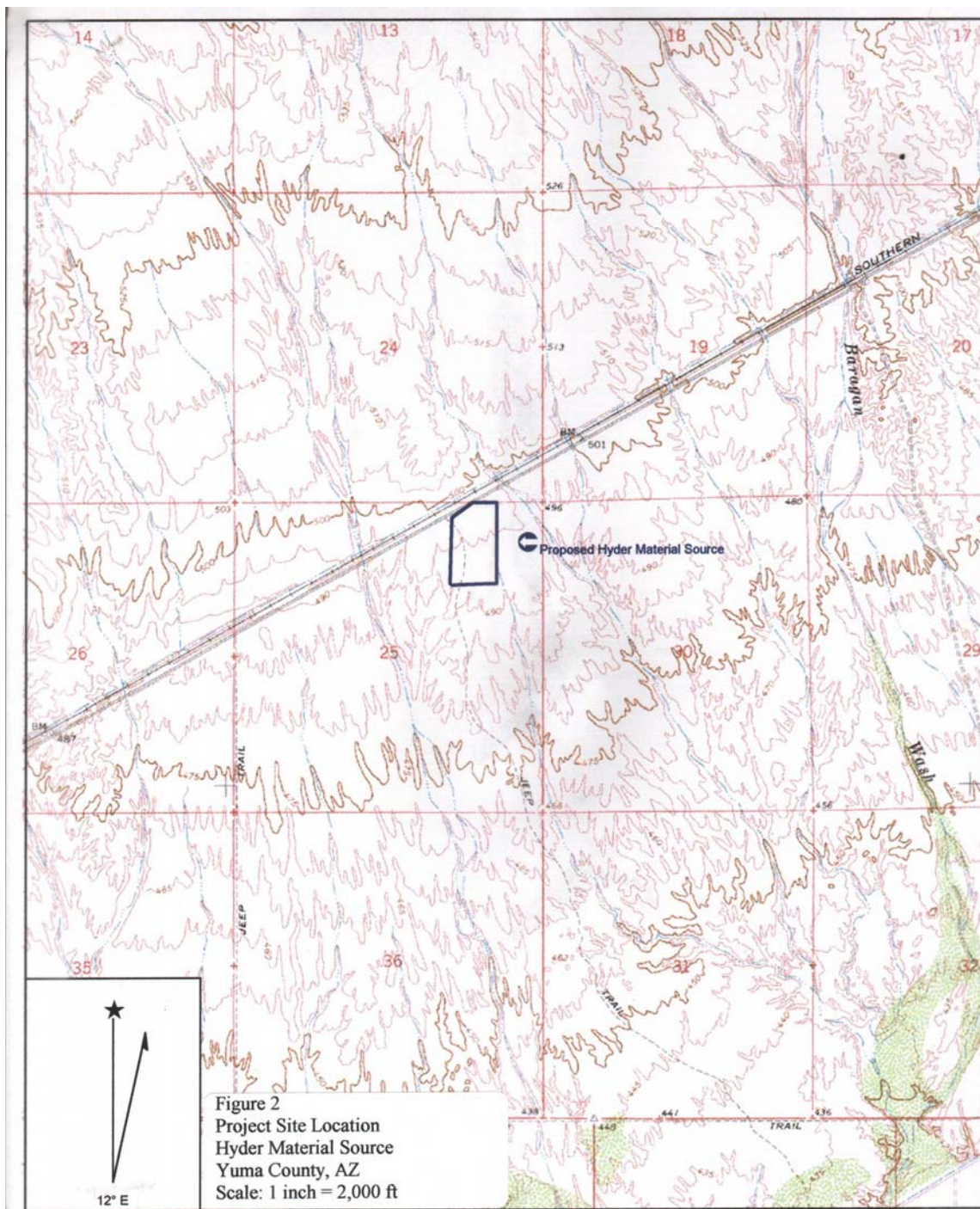
T. 5 S., R. 12 W.,
sec. 25, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ (within); NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ (within).

The area described contains approximately 20.0 acres.

The proposed permit area would encompass 20 acres, more or less. The location of the project site is shown in Figure 2. The mining process begins with material removal by a bulldozer and/or backhoe. The material would be stockpiled, crushed where needed, and separated according to size into stockpiles. After crushing, the final product would be loaded into trucks and hauled to the road maintenance project area via existing access and County roads. If approved, Yuma County would be required to comply with the following mitigating measures:

1. Any archaeological, historical, or paleontological remains discovered by the permittee, or any person working on the permittee's behalf, on public or Federal land shall be immediately reported to the Authorized Officer. All operations in the immediate area of such discovery shall be suspended until written authorization to proceed is issued by the Authorized Officer.
2. All firewood (vegetative material greater than three inches in diameter) shall be stockpiled in a place readily accessible by truck. The remaining brush shall be piled in piles less than three feet tall and no greater than 10 ft in diameter. These piles shall be placed in the reclaimed portions of the permitted areas.
3. The permittee shall furnish and apply water or use other means satisfactory to the Authorized Officer for dust control.





4. The site shall be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times; waste materials shall be disposed of promptly at an appropriate waste disposal site. "Waste" is defined as all discarded matter including, but not limited to, human waste, trash, garbage, refuse, oil drums, petroleum products, ashes, and equipment.
5. Public hazards caused by the operations shall be prevented by signs and/or appropriate fencing.
6. All applicable terms and stipulations of Standard Form 3600-9 and standard Yuma District material removal stipulations will apply.
7. Upon cessation of operations, the pit shall be scarified to a depth of 12 inches by rippers spaced 12 inches apart, in order to reduce compaction. Pit walls shall be maintained or graded to a final slope of 3:1 (horizontal : vertical).
8. If a desert tortoise is found in a project area, activities should be modified to avoid injuring or harming it. If activities cannot be modified, tortoises shall be moved from harm's way. Upon discovery of a desert tortoise in harm's way, the authorized biologist shall translocate the animal the minimum distance possible (but not more than two miles) within appropriate habitat to ensure its safety from death, injury, or collection associated with the project or other activities. The authorized biologist shall be allowed some discretion to ensure that survival of each relocated desert tortoise is likely. Desert tortoises shall not be translocated to lands outside the administration of the Federal government without the written permission of the landowner.

Only biologists authorized by the BLM and the appropriate State Fish and Game Department shall handle desert tortoises. Handling procedures for desert tortoises shall adhere to protocols outlined in the *Management Plan for the Sonoran Desert Population of the Desert Tortoise in Arizona* (December 1996).

2.2 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Alternatives to the proposed action consist of the No Action Alternative, which consists of not issuing a Free Use Permit to Yuma County for the Hyder pit by the BLM. Yuma County would not be able to repair County roads on an emergency basis from material at this source.

3.1 GENERAL SETTING

The project site is located approximately six miles southwest of the Hyder, south of Hyder Road and the Southern Pacific Railroad and east of the Maricopa County line in Yuma County, Arizona. The site is located approximately four miles north of the Gila River. Elevation at the project site is approximately 490 ft above mean sea level (msl). The project site is located within the Palomas Plain, with the Palomas Mountains to the west, the Eagletail Mountains to the north, and the Gila Bend Mountains to the northeast.

The project site is fairly undisturbed, although some portions have been previously-impacted by off-road vehicles. Topography is generally flat, with a slight downward slope to the southeast. Soils are compacted rocky gravels, sometimes referred to as desert pavement. West Wash is located to the west of the site and Smith Wash is located to the east of the site. A powerline traverses the northern portion of the site. Other land use includes off-highway vehicle use, open space, and wildlife habitat.

Climate in the project area is typical of the arid southwest, which is characterized by long, hot summers and mild winters. Average annual rainfall is approximately three inches. Elevation at the site is approximately 440 feet (ft) above mean sea level (msl).

3.2 CULTURAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL

Known cultural resource sites within a mile radius of the proposed project area include the Southern Pacific Railroad (Wellton-Phoenix-Eloy spur), a prehistoric rock ring site, and a prehistoric rock ring/cleared area site with lithics. Transcon Environmental conducted a Class III cultural resources survey of the project area in October 2004. No archaeological sites or isolated artifacts were found in the project area (Transcon Environmental 2004).

3.3 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The project area is within the Visual Resource Management Class IV. Class IV lands may contain contrasts to the basic landscape elements caused by the management action which are evident but remain subordinate to the existing landscape. The visual setting in the project area is dominated by Hyder Road to the north and the existing powerline in

the northern portion of the site. The project would be visible from vehicles traveling on Hyder Road.

3.4 VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Vegetation communities within the project vicinity are described as Lower Colorado River subdivision of the Sonoran Desert by Brown (1994). Biological surveys of the project site were conducted by J. Himes on October 12, 2004. Vegetation within the vicinity of the project site is very sparse, and dominated by creosotebush (*Larrea tridentata*) and four wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) with cholla (*Opuntia* sp.) and fishhook cactus (*Ferocactus wislizenii*) also observed. A few paloverde (*Cercidium floridum*) and ironwood (*Olneya tesota*) trees occur within and adjacent to the project site. Five saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) also occur within the project site.

Wildlife and/or wildlife sign observed in the project area include mourning doves (*Zenaida macroura*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus auduboni*), whiptails (*Cnemidophorus* sp.), and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*). Wildlife typical of Lower Colorado River subdivision also anticipated to occur in the area includes coyote (*Canis latrans*), round-tailed ground squirrel (*Spermophilus tereticaudus*), desert pocket mouse (*Perognathus penicillatus*), and a variety of snakes and lizards.

3.5 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) was contacted for a list of federally-listed, proposed, and candidate species which may occur in Yuma County. The BLM's Sensitive Species List (October 2000) of sensitive species which occur in the Yuma Resource Area was also reviewed. The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) was contacted to access the Heritage Data Management System. Current AGFD records do not indicate the presence of any special status species in the project vicinity (three-mile radius). Based on the results of the Biological Evaluation (Himes Consulting LLC 2003), development of the proposed project site would result in no effect to federally-listed, threatened, or candidate species.

3.6 SOILS/MINERALS

Both the surface and subsurface minerals are under federal ownership. The National Resources Conservation Service has described soils within the project site as Harqua-Tremant complex (Soil Conservation Service 1980). The Harqua soils comprise about 45

percent of the complex and the Tremant soil about 40 percent. Carrizo very gravelly sand, Rositas sand, and Antho sandy loam comprise the remaining 15 percent of this complex. Very little vegetation occurs on this soil complex where desert pavement occurs.

3.7 GRAZING

No grazing occurs within or near the proposed project area (Mr. Roger Oyler, BLM, personal communication, 2004).

3.8 WILD HORSES AND BURROS

Wild horses and burros do not occur within or near the project area (Mr. Roger Oyler, BLM, personal communication, 2004). Evidence of wild horses or burros was not observed during site surveys on October 12, 2004.

3.9 FLOODPLAINS

The proposed project area is not located within the 100-year floodplain (FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map Panel No. 0400990525B).

3.10 AIR QUALITY

Air quality in the project vicinity is usually high due to the remoteness from urban areas, but may decline for short periods because of blowing dust from unpaved roadways and agricultural burning in the vicinity. The project site is not located within a PM₁₀ non-attainment area.

3.11 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

No hazardous materials were observed during the site visit in October 2004.

3.12 INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

There are four invasive, non-native species of concern in the vicinity of the proposed project: Sahara mustard (*Brassica tourneforti*), buffelgrass (*Pennisetum cillare*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), and tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp.). None of these species or other noxious weeds were observed during surveys of the project site.

3.12 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice directs that programs, policies, and activities not have a disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effect on minority and low-income populations. Low-income and minority populations are present within Yuma County. The nearest town, Hyder, is located approximately six miles northeast of the proposed project site. There are no minority populations in the vicinity of the project site.

3.13 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

The Bureau of Land Management has initiated consultation for this project. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment.

4.1 IMPACTS FROM THE PROPOSED ACTION

The following critical elements were not present or would not be affected by the proposed action:

- Wetlands/Riparian
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Farmlands (Prime or Unique) farmlands
- Wild and Scenic rivers
- Water Quality (Drinking or Ground)
- Standards for Rangeland Health
- Floodplains
- Cultural Resources
- Threatened or Endangered Species
- Wilderness

4.1.1 CULTURAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL

No impacts would occur to cultural or archaeological resources from the proposed action as none occur within the project area (Transcon Environmental 2004).

4.1.2 VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The proposed action would be consistent with the objectives for Visual Resource Management Class IV. Proposed changes to the existing character of the landscape can be high.

4.1.3 VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Existing vegetation within the undisturbed portions of the project site would be removed during the mining process. Once mining is completed, reclamation of the material source would be scarified to allow natural revegetation. Native cactus, including saguaro and barrel cactus, would be avoided to the degree possible. If avoidance is not possible, then these plants would be transplanted to adjacent public lands outside of the project area or other BLM-approved locations.

Wildlife within the proposed project area would be displaced during proposed project activities. Wildlife would be anticipated to return to the project area following reclamation and revegetation of the area.

Development of the proposed project site would impact 20 acres of potential foraging habitat for four BLM sensitive bat species: the big free-tailed bat, the cave myotis, California leaf-nosed bat, and the pocketed free-tailed bat. As the project site appears to provide marginal habitat for foraging due to the lack of a water source and very sparse vegetation, these impacts would not be anticipated to adversely impact these species on a regional basis.

Development of the project would reduce 20 acres of potential habitat for four BLM sensitive species: the cheeseweed moth lacewing, the chuckwalla, the rosy boa, and the loggerhead shrike. Based on the abundance of similar habitat types within the surrounding areas, project impacts would not be anticipated to adversely impact the species on a regional basis.

4.1.4 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

As there are no federally-listed threatened or endangered plant and species which occur within or near the project site, no impacts to federally-listed species would occur from the proposed project.

4.1.5 SOILS/MINERALS

Construction and operation of the proposed action could result in the disturbance and alteration of up to 20 acres of undisturbed native soil and underlying minerals. Impacts to native soil and minerals would result from the clearing of protective vegetation, excavation of materials, and the associated loss of soil productivity in undisturbed areas.

Dust control would be provided on cleared areas on an as-needed basis to reduce dust generation and off-site deposition of soils from the project site. Scarification of project areas during reclamation would reduce impacts to soils over the long-term.

4.1.6 GRAZING

As no grazing occurs in the project vicinity, no loss of Animal Unit Months would occur from implementation of the proposed action.

4.1.7 WILD HORSES AND BURROS

As wild horses and burros do not occur in the project vicinity, no impacts would occur to wild horses and burros from the proposed action.

4.1.8 FLOODPLAINS

As no floodplains occur within the project area, floodplains would not be impacted from the development of the proposed project.

4.1.9 AIR QUALITY

Short-term impacts to air quality would occur locally during excavation, processing, and hauling. Dust control would reduce these impacts during operation. Yuma County would maintain a current Air Quality Permit for a crusher at the proposed project site, if needed, which would include stipulations for dust control. Impacts to local air quality would be reduced over the long-term by the reclamation activities at the site. The project site is not located within a PM₁₀ non-attainment area.

4.1.10 HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

No hazardous materials were observed during site surveys of the project area. Operations would require the use of small amounts of hazardous materials (such as oil, grease, and anti-freeze). However, good housekeeping procedures would be used during operations to minimize the potential for a spill. All materials would be removed following completion of operations.

4.1.11 INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES

Invasive, nonnative species of concern were not observed during surveys of the proposed project site. Implementation of the proposed action is not anticipated to result in adverse impacts regarding invasive, non-native species.

4.1.12 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Due to the distance of the proposed project site from the Hyder, low-income populations would not be impacted by the proposed action. As there are no minority populations in the project vicinity, minority populations would not be impacted by the proposed action.

4.1.13 NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

The Bureau of Land Management has initiated consultation for this project. The results of this consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Assessment.

4.2 IMPACTS FROM THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would result in a Free Use Permit being denied for the project site and there would be no negative impacts to air quality, soils, wildlife, vegetation, recreation, or visual resources from implementation of the no action alternative. As the need for materials for emergency repair of County roads would not be fulfilled, Yuma County would need to find other material sources.

4.3 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The proposed action would result in the extraction of up to 100,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel from the proposed project site over a 10-year period. The proposed action would add up to 20 acres of new disturbance to the previous disturbances in Yuma County. With this and other similar actions proposed by Yuma County, up to a total of approximately 110 acres of new disturbance would occur and potentially up to 1,600,000 cubic yards of material would be removed. New disturbance would add cumulatively to short-term impacts in the project vicinity, including impacts to soils, vegetation & wildlife, visual resources, and localized air quality. Reclamation would occur at the end of mining operations, which would aid in the long-term recovery of the project site. Implementation of the proposed action is therefore not expected to result in adverse cumulative impacts over the long-term.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The following persons and agencies were contacted or consulted during preparation of this EA:

Federal

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Rob Wilson

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Land Management, Yuma Field Office:

Stephen Fusilier, Team Lead, Lands and Minerals

Matthew Plis, Geologist

Sandra Arnold, Archaeologist

Jennifer Green, Natural Resource Specialist

Karen Reichhardt, Team Lead, Resources

Acting Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Roger Oyler, Rangeland Management Specialist

Aaron Curtis, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Jeff Young, Wildlife Biologist

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

State

Arizona Department of Game and Fish

Arizona State Historic Preservation Office

REFERENCES

Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team. December 1996. Management Plan for the Sonoran Desert Population of the Desert Tortoise in Arizona.

Brown, David E., 1994. Biotic Communities, Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico. University of Utah Press; Salt Lake City.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1987. Yuma District Resource Management Plan. February.

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix District Office. Lower Gila South Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, June 1988.

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USDA Soil Conservation Service. 1980. Soil Survey of Yuma-Wellton Area. Parts of Yuma County, Arizona and Imperial County, California. In Cooperation with the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station and the California Agricultural Experiment Station.

Transcon Environmental. 2004. A Class III Cultural Resources Survey of Bureau of Land Management Administered Land in the Vicinity of Hyder, Yuma County, AZ. BLM Cultural Resource Project Record No. BLM-AZ-050-2004-076.

Federal Emergency Management Agency. Flood Insurance Rate Maps. www.fema.gov/mapstore